

of the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo. This is the next necessary step for implementation of our conditions. I'm pleased that it will take place, and I hope the talks will proceed professionally and expeditiously.

As I said yesterday, our diplomatic and military efforts will continue until we see Serb forces begin to withdraw in a full-scale manner. Our experience in the Balkans teaches us that true peace can only come when progress in discussions is followed by progress on the ground.

At the same time, there is an enormous opportunity to be seized here, a chance to shift our focus from defeating something evil to building something good; a chance to work with our Allies to bring a stable and prosperous and democratic southeastern Europe, in which people are never again singled out for destruction simply because of their religious faith or their ethnic origin. This is a goal that has been worth fighting for over the last weeks, a goal which must be uppermost in our minds as we make sure our conditions are met, a goal we must work for with steadfast determination in the months and in the years to come.

And I believe that the overwhelming majority of Americans share this goal. We do not want our children to grow up in a world which is dominated by people who believe they can kill innocent civilians because of the way they worship God or the way they were born.

Disability Employment Awards

Fifty years ago Harry Truman, the very first President to present the awards that we present today, set a goal for our Nation. I'd like to repeat it: to give every American with a disability the chance to play their full part in strengthening our Nation and sharing the greatest satisfaction of American life, to be independent and self-supporting.

Today we gather to honor three Americans whose efforts to bring more and more people with disabilities into the world of work have moved us closer to that great and just goal. Since the founding of our Nation, work has been at the heart of the American dream. Because millions of Americans have had the opportunity to work and to build better lives

for themselves and their families, our Nation is enjoying historic strength and prosperity. Through work, we reinforce the values that hold us together as a society, the values of responsibility, perseverance, striving for the future.

And in so many ways, we define ourselves as Americans not only by our families and our hometowns but by our work. Often, the first question Americans ask each other is not, who are your parents or where do you live but what do you do. Today, still, there are too many Americans with disabilities who've never had the chance to answer that question. Even as we celebrate more than 18 million new jobs and a nationwide unemployment rate of 4.2 percent, the lowest in a generation, as the Secretary has said, 75 percent of Americans with disabilities remain unemployed. And of that number, 72 percent, almost three-quarters, say they want to go to work.

This is not just a missed opportunity for Americans with disabilities. It's a missed opportunity for America. This is an era now of labor shortages, where companies go begging for employees they need to stay competitive in the global economy. And we simply cannot afford to ignore the potential of millions of potential workers simply because they have a disability.

One of the things I have spent a great deal of time on in the last year, particularly, is trying to work with my economic advisers on issues that only peripherally involve the disability community but that you are a central part of resolving. And it is this: How can we continue to grow this economy and lift the standards of living of our people until we embrace everybody who has not participated in the recovery; keep the recovery going, which is already the longest peacetime recovery in history, and not have an explosion of inflation?

There are—if you think about it, there are only, I would argue to you, three possible answers to that. You either have to get more workers who are unemployed, generally, in the society, into the work force so that they not only are helping themselves but helping the rest of us by becoming consumers and taxpayers and growing the economy; you have to go to those discreet areas where

whole areas have been left out of our economic growth; or you have to find more customers for America's goods and services around the world.

Therefore, I have continued to push the idea of the expansion of trade on fair and just terms. I have promoted the empowerment zones that the Vice President has so ably led our efforts in for the last 6½ years, and this new markets initiative, to reach into the rural areas, the urban communities, the Native American reservations where there has been almost no economic growth. We have cut the welfare rolls almost in half, trying to move able-bodied people from welfare to work.

The last big chunk of people in this country who could keep the economy going for all of us, with low inflation, are the Americans with disabilities, who want to work, who can work, and who are not in the work force. Every American citizen should have a selfish interest in the pursuit of this goal in the most aggressive possible way.

As everybody here knows—and Secretary Herman already mentioned it—one of the very largest obstacles to employment for Americans with disabilities is the fear that they'll lose their health insurance once they take a job—that which is provided by the Federal Government. Not so very long ago, I went in February to New Hampshire and had a roundtable about this, where people were explicitly discussing this in graphic terms, giving through the press to the American people dollars-and-cents reports on what the consequences of this would be.

Under current law, many people with disabilities simply can't work and keep Medicare or Medicaid. For many Americans, medical bills literally cost thousands of dollars beyond what is typically covered by an employer's private insurance. For many Americans, their medical bills would be greater than their entire salary.

Therefore, we keep a lot of people out of the work force. But we don't save the Federal Government any money, because they're spending the money anyway, on the health care. So we deny opportunities to millions; we prevent the American economy from reaching its full potential; we don't save the

Federal Treasury one red cent, because the health care money is being spent anyway.

Today, as a country, it is time to say that no American should have to choose between going to work and paying the medical bills. Last summer, and in the State of the Union, I asked Congress to free our fellow Americans from this unfair burden. The "Work Incentive Improvement Act," sponsored by Senators Jeffords and Kennedy, Senators Roth and Moynihan, and a wide group of sponsors in both Houses, from both parties, will do just that. There are, at last count, over 70 Members of the Senate who have signed on to the bill.

There has been a lot of commentary lately about how hard it is to get legislation through the Congress, with the partisan divide. Well, there are a lot of issues on which Republicans and Democrats have honest disagreements. Thank goodness this is not one of them. Because it is not one of them, because we already have over 70 people who say they will vote for this if they can just get a chance to vote for it on the floor of the Senate, I am confident that we can work together to pass the work incentives bill by July the 26th of this year, the 9th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We can celebrate that great, historic, bipartisan landmark by opening the doors of opportunity for millions of people even wider, enabling more Americans with disabilities to join the proud ranks of working citizens.

There is more, I would argue, that we should do. In my balanced budget presented to the Congress, I proposed a \$1,000 tax credit to help people with disabilities afford special transportation technology, which you've already heard about, or personal assistance needed to make the transition to work. And we must double our efforts to make assistive technology, such as voice recognition software, mobile telephones, braille translators, more widely available. So I ask Congress to move forward with both of these proposals in my budget.

And today I am taking immediate action to give more Americans with disabilities the opportunity to become part of the largest work force in America. On Monday the First Lady, the Vice President, and Mrs. Gore and